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ABSTRACT

Clinical child interviews have received little attention in the psychological literature and in the absence of empirical findings, curent interview practices are primarily based on clinical lore. In order to investigate the effects of interviewing style and interviewer mode of dress, on the quantity and quality of information obtained from 8 to 11 year-olds in a standardized clinical analogue interview, two male interviewers saw a total of 64 boys and girls, selected from a normal school population. The design included three independent variables: "warm" or "reserved" interviewing style, formally or casually dressed interviewer, and male or female children. After the interview, children completed a reinforcement schedule and an attitude survey. Analyses of these results and the ratings of the dependent variables showed no significant differences for any of these variables on the dependent measures of self-disclosure, amount of speech, problem admissions, listing of reinforcers, and rated liking of the interview. Significant correlations were found between children's grade level and several of the dependent measures. The findings suggest that the establishment of a warm, supporting relationship may not be necessary in a short clinical child interview for obtaining a certain level of quality and quantity of information. (Author/PAS)

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Effects of Interviewing Style and Interviewer Appearance on a Child Behavioral Interview

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Running Head: Child Interview

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Abstract

Clinical child interviews have received little attention in the psychological literature. In the absence of empirical findings, current interview practices are primarily based on clinical lore. This study investigated the effects of two variables, interviewing style and interviewer mode of dress, on the quantity and quality of information obtained from 8 to 11 year-olds in a standardized clinical analogue interview. Two male interviewers saw a total of 64 boys and girls, selected from a normal school population. The design included three independent variables: "warm" or "reserved" interviewing style, formally or casually dressed interviewer, and male or female children. The results of this study showed no significant differences for any of these variables on the dependent measures of self-disclosure, amount of speech, problem admissions, listing of reinforcers, and rated liking of the interview. Significant correlations were found between children's grade level and several of the dependent measures. Maturational level of the children, preinterview mental set, the brevity of the interview, and measurement issues were suggested as possible explanations of the surprising findings. Previous recommendations for maximizing the effectiveness of child interviews were questioned in light of the obtained lack of differential effects between interview styles.

Effects of Interviewing Style and Interviewer Appearance on the Child Behavioral Interview

Clinical Psychology has traditionally relied on the interview as a major component of the assessment process (Maloney & Ward, 1976). Although assessment interviews have been primarily used with adults, several studies have reported promising results regarding the usefulness and reliability of child interviews (Herjanic & Campbell, 1977; Herjanic, Herjanic, Brown, & Wheatt, 1975; Langner, Herson, Green, Jamesson, & Goff, 1970; Rutter & Graham, 1968; Sherwin, Schoelly, Klein, Schwartz, & Kahn, 1965). However, little scientific attention has been focused upon the variables affecting child interviews, elements which may maximize the clinically relevant information gleaned from this common assessment procedure.

While recognizing the absence of empirical research in this area, Ross (1980) has nevertheless advocated that a warm and supportive interviewing approach should be used with children. This suggestion by Ross, however, is in contrast with findings from studies of adult interviews. Results of several investigations indicated that "reserved" or cold interviewing styles may be superior to warm interviewing conditions in facilitating self-disclosure and the discussion of problems (Heller, Davis, & Myers, 1966;

Pope & Siegman, 1968; Heller, 1971; Heller, 1968; Ganzer & Sarason, 1964; Sarason & Winkel, 1966).

In an effort to determine if these findings may also hold true for children, this study investigated the effects of "warm" versus "reserved" interviewing styles on the quantity and quality of information obtained in standardized clinical analogue interviews with 8 to 11 year-olds. It was hypothesized that, similar to adults, children would self-disclose more under reserved as compared to warm interviewing styles (probably in an effort to elicit signs of approval or feedback from the interviewer). Their attitudes toward the interview, on the other hand, were predicted to be less favorable under the reserved as compared to the warm condition.

In addition to interviewing style, a second variable, interviewer clothing style, was investigated. This variable had not been previously researched in the context of clinical interviews but had been suspected by Gottschalk and Gleser (1969) to affect the behavior of interviewees. It was hypothesized that although they would not differ in their verbal response patterns, children would have more favorable attitudes toward the interview experience if the interviewer was dressed in a casual, informal manner as compared to wearing a more formal and "distancing" attire.

Method

Subjects

Sixty-four children, 32 boys and 32 girls between the ages of 8 and 12 participated in the study. They were recruited from the school district of a small midwestern college town. Home addresses were obtained from school census data, and all parents with eligible children were sent a letter explaining the project. Shortly after the letter had been mailed, parents were contacted by phone in the order of their alphabetical listing in the telephone directory until all participants were slected. Approximately 50% of the parents contacted agreed to have their children participate.

Following the selection process, groups were matched for sex and children were randomly assigned to one of the four interviewing conditions. In addition, each interviewer (two male graduate students from a doctoral program in clinical psychology) saw the same number of boys and girls in all interviewing conditions.

Apparatus

Video recordings were made of all interviews through a one-way mirror; in addition, two audiotapes were made of each interview (commercially available equipment). The children's speech duration was measured by playing back a tape containing only the children's verbalizations on a

recorder which was connected to a voice activated relay and a timer. The timer utilized was a 14-15D Digital 0.1 Second Timer, available through Marietta Apparatus Co., Ohio. The voice activated relay was developed specifically for this project and a circuit description and block diagram may be obtained from the first author. The children's speech tapes were made by having the interviewer depress a microswitch which turned off one of the audiotape microphones whenever he talked during the interview.

Design and Independent Variables

The study employed a 2 x 2 x 2 design in which the independent variables were sex of the child, "warm" versus "reserved" interviewing style, and formal versus casual interviewer clothing style. In the "warm" condition, the interviewer greeted the children with a hand shake, smiled and nodded during the interview, and leaned forward towards the child. In the "reserved" condition, the interviewer greeted the child without shaking hands, spoke unsmilingly, sat straight in the chair, and refrained from nodding.

The interviewer's adherence to the "warm" and "reserved" interviewing styles was evaluated by two judges who independently rated the video recordings of all interviews on two 5-point Liker-type scales ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". A rating by both raters of "agree" or "strongly agree" on one scale (warm or reserved) and "disagree"

or "strongly disagree" on the opposite scale, was considered confirmation of the interviewer's adherence to one particular interviewing style. All interviews were correctly identified by both judges as being either "warm" or "reserved", indicating that the two interviewers clearly followed the instructions of displaying either "warm" or "reserved" styles.

The independent variable of clothing style included two conditions: "formal" and "casual" clothing styles. In the formal clothing condition, the interviewer wore a sport coat, dress slacks, a white shirt, and a necktie. In the casual condition, the interviewer wore corduroy pants and a striped cotton shirt without a necktie.

Procedure

The children were greeted by the experimenter and were escorted by him to the interviewing room. There the children were asked to take a seat and were informed that the interviewer would be with them shortly. The children's and the interviewer's chairs faced each other at about a 45 degree angle about three feet apart. Each interview lasted between approximately 5 and 10 minutes and was conducted in the same room.

The interview questions remained the same across all four conditions. The questions and introductory remarks were read to the children by the interviewers from a sheet of paper. To control for the timing of the presentation of the

questions, the interviewers were instructed to wait for about three seconds after a child had finished talking before presenting a new question. Some of the questions were taken from Jourard's (1971) "Self-Disclosure Topics for Children Aged 6-12", some from Rutter and Graham's (1968) psychiatric child interview and some were developed by the author. The questions contained such items as: "Tell me a little about the things that you did that you were not supposed to do.", "what are you most afraid of?" and "what do you like to play with?".

After the interviewer had finished and left the room, the children were asked by the experimenter to complete a reinforcement survey schedule and a short questionnaire about their attitudes toward the interview and the interviewer. The reinforcer survey schedule was a slightly modified version of the reinforcer survey schedule described by Phillips, Fischer, and Singh (1977), covering such areas as foods, beverages, animals, games, play, etc. The attitudinal questionnaire contained 10 items, such as "The man who asked me questions was nice," or "I did not like the interview". Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree".

Dependent Variables

Verbal Productivity. The duration of the children's verbalizations was used as the measure of productivity. The

voice activated relay mentioned above was used for this measure. Speech duration was measured twice for each interview to compute a reliability coefficient. Ebel's (1951) intraclass rater reliability statistic was used to compute the reliability coefficient for this and all other rated dependent measures.

As a second measure of verbal productivity, the total number of words was computed from a random selection of 1/3 of all questions.

Rated Intimacy of Self-Disclosure. The intimacy of self-disclosure was rated independently by two judges (blind to design and hypotheses) from the sound recordings of the interviews using the Vondracek (1971) Rating Scale for Self-Disclosure in Preadolescents. The subjects' responses to each question were rated, as a whole, to determine the overall level of self-disclosure of each response. The highest possible level was the one used as the self-disclosure score for each response. This method is in contrast to the possible procedure of breaking down an answer into subsections which could then be rated separately. Since this latter method might be confounded with the duration of a child's speech it was not employed in this study. For the computation of a total depth of disclosure score for each interview, the scores by the two raters were summed across all 31 questions.

Comprehensiveness of Interview Information. Two major

methods, the listing of reinforcers and the admission of problem behaviors, were used to assess the tendency of the children to provide comprehensive answers to the interview questions. As the first measure, the total number of reinforcers listed by the child in response to questions 25 through 31 was computed. These questions covered such areas as favorite foods and beverages, animals, sports, games, favorite things to play with, and favortie pastime activities with friends and family. In addition, a ratio was computed between the total number of reinforcing items listed during the interview and the total number of items endorsed as "like very much" in respective areas of the reinforcer survey schedule (foods, animals, games, etc.). The reinforcer ratio was computed to control for possible individual differences in the number of reinforcing items. It might have been argued, for example, that children who in general find fewer items reinforcing, might mention fewer items in the interview, confounding individual differences with the experimental conditions. Since one child failed to complete the reinforcer survey schedule, the reinforcer ratio measure contained one missing value.

As the second measure, the number of problem behaviors each child admitted to was computed and summed across all questions for each interviewing condition. Problem behaviors were considered those verbalizations that obtained a score

in the "Transgressions" category of the Vondracek Rating Scale for Self-Disclosure in Preadolescents. Each transgression mentioned by the children was also rated as either a level I, level II, or level III (see Vondracek, 1971). More than one rating of number of transgressions could be obtained for each question. Aside from being measures of the children's willingness to self-disclose, these variables were believed to be more direct assessments of the accomplishment of the clinical goals of a behavioral assessment interview: the identification of reinforcers and specific problematic behaviors.

Attitudinal Assessment. The children's attitude toward the interview and the interviewer were assessed by administering a 10-item post-interview questionnaire described above. The responses of each child were summed to obtain a composite score which reflected a child's overall attitude towards the interview situation. The internal consistency of the questionnaire was assessed by computing Cronbach's Alpha.

Results

Reliability of Measures

Rater reliabilities were assessed by computing Ebel's (1951) intraclass rater reliability coefficient. The values used for the reliability assessment were the summed scores across questions for each interview. The following reliability

coefficients were obtained for the different dependent measures: Duration of speech (r = .999), number of words (r = .992), self-disclosure (r = .958)[1], number of reinforcers (r = .984), number of problem behaviors (r = .916), and level of severity of problem behaviors (r = .914).

Cronbach's Alpha was calculated for the 10-item post-interview questionnaire. The value of .85 suggests that the questionnaire is an internally consistent measure.

Main Analyses

A multivariate analysis of variance was computed on the three independent variables of interviewing style, interviewer clothing, and sex of children, using the values for the eight dependent measures of self-disclosure, number of words, duration of speech, number of transgressions, reinforcers listed in the interview, reinforcer ratio, and post-interview questionnaire. The F ratios of this analysis ranged from .42 to 1.32 (all NS). All obtained results for both main effects and interaction effects were non-significant.

A series of t-tests performed on the overall results obtained for the two interviewers showed no differences on any of the dependent variables. This finding indicated that the interviewers did not differentially affect the children's response to the interviews as assessed by the dependent measures.

In addition, a Pearson product-moment correlation matrix

was computed for the eight dependent measures and the children's grade level. The matrix is presented in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 About Here

The obtained correlations between the measures of self-disclosure, number of transgressions, level of transgressions, number of reinforcers, and duration of speech were all significant beyond the .001 level, suggesting the possibility of a factor common to all these measures. The scores from the post-interview questionnaire, however, showed no significant intercorrelations with any of the other measures, suggesting a relative independence of this assessment instrument from the other behavioral measures. Also, no significant correlations were obtained between the reinforcer ratio and any of the other measures. This latter finding suggests that the thoroughness of children in listing all items that they considered reinforcing in certian categories was not related to the quantity of talk, amount and quality of self-disclosure, and their general attitudinal evaluation of the interview.

An interesting relationship was noted between the number of "like very much" endorsements on the reinforcer survey schedule and grade level as well as post-interview questionnaire. The correlation between number of "like very much" endorsements and grade level was negative and highly

significant ($r = -.42$, $p < .001$). The correlation between "like very much" endorsements and the questionnaire score was also highly significant, but positive ($r = .45$, $p < .001$). The means by grade levels for the post-interview questionnaire score and the number of reinforcers endorsed as "like very much" on the reinforcer survey schedule are presented in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 About Here

By referring back to Table 1 additional interesting correlations between grade level and dependent measures should be noted at this point. Significant positive correlation coefficients were obtained for the children's grade level (grades 2 to 6) and number of reinforcers ($r = .44$, $p < .001$), duration of speech ($r = .32$, $p < .01$), self-disclosure ($r = .28$, $p < .05$), and level of transgressions ($r = .25$, $p < .05$). A negative correlation coefficient ($r = -.34$, $p < .01$) was obtained for grade level and the rating of the interview on the post-interview questionnaire. These correlations suggested that children in higher grades tended to self-disclose more, list more reinforcers, and talk more during the interview than those in lower grades. On the other hand, children in higher grades also tended to give the interview a less positive rating as compared to children from lower grades.

Discussion

Contrary to initial expectations, the obtained results indicated that neither interviewing style nor interviewer appearance significantly affected the response style of the preadolescents who participated in the study. The amount of information gathered and quality of self-disclosure were very similar under "warm" and "reserved" interviewing conditions. Also, interviewer clothing style (formal versus casual attire) did not significantly influence the quality and amount of information gathered. Furthermore, neither interviewing style nor interviewer clothing style appeared to affect the children's overall attitude toward the interview situation.

These findings generally run counter to statements made by several authors about the importance of various situational or interactional variables in child interviews (Looff, 1976; Peterson, 1968; Ross, 1980; Rutter & Graham, 1968; Stevenson, 1971; Yarrow, 1960). Overall, based on the findings of this study, it appears that the establishment of a warm, supporting relationship may not be necessary in a short clinical child interview for obtaining a certain level in quality and quantity of clinically relevant information or helping to make a child feel comfortable.

The present findings do not appear to be due to a failure

in experimental manipulations. Each interview was clearly identified as either "warm" or "reserved" by two independent raters, and the lack of significant differences in the children's interview performance should be regarded as reflecting aspects of the children's present interview responses rather than a failure of the experimental manipulation. Although raters reliably identified differences in interviewing style, the children did not respond differently to changes in this variable, based on the measures employed.

One possible explanation for the children's similar interview behavior in all conditions may be their mental set toward the interview experience. It may be speculated, for example, that children are so concerned with their own performance in the interview situation that they pay little attention to other factors such as the interpersonal style of the interviewer or the general interview environment. This may be due to their effort to please their parents by meeting their expectations in giving appropriate answers to the presented questions.

An additional possibility for not detecting any differences between groups might be the relative coarseness of the measures utilized. Depth of self-disclosure, for example, is a very difficult variable not only to define operationally, but also to rate reliably. The Vondracek rating scale employed in this study had only few levels self-disclosure

depth and therefore, a measure with more detailed discriminations among levels of self-disclosure might more likely be able to detect differences.

Another hypothesis may relate to the present analogue employed. It may be argued that because of the brevity of the interviews, the children in all groups had little time to adapt to the different interviewing styles. Therefore, in longer interviews, differences may gradually develop after children have had time to adjust to the novelty of the situation. Although the obtained results indicated that for a short clinical-analogue interview, nonverbal interaction variables and clothing style have little or no effect on the information gathered or the interviewer-child relationship, as assessed by the measures employed in this study, the effects of these variables on a longterm therapeutic relationship still have to be established empirically. It must also be emphasized that the present study was an interview analogue which used volunteer subjects. Children who are referred for a clinical evaluation or psychotherapy might respond differently in a similar situation. Children referred for an evaluation, it might be speculated, are more anxious and have a more unfavorable attitude toward the interview process. A "warm" interview with these children, therefore, might be considered helping them to self-disclose by creating a more comfortable and less threatening atmosphere

than a "reserved" interview.

Children's Grade Level and Interview Evaluation

An interesting relationship between children's grade level and their evaluation of the interview was found. With increasing grade levels, children evaluated the interview and interviewer increasingly less positively. This trend may render additional support to the above explanation that some subjects may have approached the interview with a mental set of cooperating with the interviewer possibly to meet parental expectations. With increasing grade level and corresponding independence, however, children may become less focused on their performance and have a reduced need for parental approval. Then they may be better able to evaluate critically other variables such as interpersonal cues or their own emotional states. Thus, it may be suggested that the lower interview rating of the older children (though in the present sample, still preadolescents) may reflect their higher level of maturity and increased ability to assess and evaluate critically their social and physical environment. Similar experimental manipulations with older, adolescent populations might very well find differences, at least on the post-interview questionnaire. Whether these would be differentially affected by the experimental manipulations is a matter for empirical test.

Several other relationships between grade level and

the dependent variables were found, which overall may be attributed to general developmental differences among the younger and older children in the study. Older children tended to talk longer, self-disclose more, list more reinforcers during the interview, and tended to admit to more problem behaviors. On the post-interview questionnaire, however, an inverse relationship was found between grade level and the number of reinforcing items endorsed as "like very much". Older children endorsed fewer items as "like very much" than did younger children. A possible explanation for this relationship may be the greater ability of older children to make finer discriminations between objects and activities they enjoy, as compared to a tendency of younger children to see things in more broad, dicotomous terms. This explanation would also be in support of the interpretation of the differences on the post-interview questionnaire, which were attributed to maturational levels regarding the ability to critically perceive and evaluate the environment.

With regard to the relatively high intercorrelations among most of the dependent variables it may be suggested that future researchers include merely one or two of these measures. This would save much time in the rating process and would probably result in higher initial interrater reliabilities. If appropriate equipment is available, the speech duration measure does not only seem to be the most reliable,

but also the most economical to use.

Since age appeared to have some influence on the children's interviewing behavior and their post-interview evaluations of the interview, future research is suggested to further investigate this possible developmental trend. Further investigations should also focus on other variables that may influence children's reactions toward interviewing, such as their pre-interview attitude and parental instructions to the child before the interview.

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Table 1

Correlation Matrix of Children's Grade Level and Dependent Measures[1]

	PIQ	SD	TRGN	TRGL	WORDN	TIME	RFI	RFR
Grade	-.34**	.28*	.23	.25*	.39**	.32**	.44***	.12
PIQ		.01	.08	.05	-.01	.00	.11	-.18
SD			.69***	.69***	.60***	.57***	.52***	.03
TRGN				.99***	.59***	.58***	.48***	-.04
TRGL					.60***	.59***	.50***	-.04
WORDN						.93***	.63***	.12
TIME							.73***	.12
RFI								.17

* p .05
** p .01
*** p .001

1) The dependent measures are:

GRADE = Children's Grade Level
PIQ = Post-interview Questionnaire
SD = Self-disclosure
TRGN = Number of Transgressions
TRGL = Level of Transgressions
WORDN = Number of Words
TIME = Duration of Speech
RFI = Number of Reinforcers Listed in Interview
RFR = Reinforcer Ratio

Table 2

Means of Post-Interview Questionnaire (PIQ) and Number of "like very much" Endorsements on the Reinforcer Survey Schedule (RSS)

GRADE	N	Means PIQ	Means RSS
2	6	41.7**	42.8
3	9	40.8	36.2
4	18 (17)*	38.2	33.4
5	16	37.1	29.2
6	15	34.9	28.7

* The RSS mean for fourth graders is based on an N of 17 because of one missing value.

** Higher scores reflect more positive attitudes toward interview.

Footnotes

1. When self-disclosure was rated concurrently with the measures of number and level of transgression, number of reinforcers, and number of words, an initial reliability coefficient of .57 was obtained. Since this coefficient was considered to be too low, it was decided to rerate questions 9 through 23, which showed the largest number of rater disagreements. These questions were the ones of primary research interest since they constituted the items designed to elicit a high level of self-disclosure (e.g., "What are you most afraid of?", "Tell me a little about the things that you did that you were not supposed to do".). The remaining questions at the beginning and the end of the interview asked for simple demographic data (e.g., "What school do you go to?"), or a listing of reinforcers (e.g., "What games do you like") and were therefore much easier to score than the more complex answers on the self-disclosure questions. Questions 9 through 23 were rerated for self-disclosure on all tapes by the same raters after a re-training session regardless as to whether there was initial agreement or disagreement. The above reported figure (r = .958) reflects the reliability of the second rating. The relatively low initial reliability coefficient for the self-disclosure variable was attributed to the rather difficult task of concurrently rating five variables.